



Welcome remarks by

**Mrs Habiba Mejri Cheikh
Director: Information and Communication
African Union Commission**

**At the
Africa Regional Media Dialogue
The Role of Media in Africa's Development**

**Organized by the Advocacy and Communication Cluster of the
Regional Coordination Mechanism of the United Nations**

On 7 June 2011 in Maseru, Lesotho

- **Excellency Mr Mothejoa Metsing, Minister of Information and Communication of the Kingdom of Lesotho**
- **Ms Ahunna Eziakonwa- Onochie, UN Resident Coordinator in the Kingdom of Lesotho**
- **Professor Richard Mkandawire, Head of Directorate- Partnerships, Resource Mobilisation and Communications at the NEPAD Agency**
- **Mrs Mieke Ikegame – Chief Coordination- Advocacy and Communication Programme Development Unit at the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Africa and co chair of the Advocacy and Communications Cluster**
- **Dear colleagues, representatives of the media**

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I am pleased to welcome you all to this 2nd Africa Regional Dialogue, focusing on the role of media in Africa's development. I bring you special greetings from the Chairperson of the AU Commission H.E Dr Jean Ping, who conveys his encouragement and support for the success of this media dialogue. As those of you who have met and worked with him may know, Dr Ping is a strong believer that media has a big role in the development of the continent, and that he has done a lot to promote the functioning of the African media.

Please allow me, at the beginning, to express my most sincere appreciation, and that of the leadership of the African Union Commission, for the presence here of the Honourable Minister of Information of the Kingdom of Lesotho. This presence is a measure of the seriousness with which the government of Lesotho takes issues of communication and information, and an affirmation of its belief in the importance of media for development. I believe that this high level show of support will encourage vigorous debate on the issues on our agenda, as well as drive us to come up with actionable and time based plans.

The AU is very much encouraged by the level of participation at this meeting. I think it is safe to conclude that, within these four walls, we have some of the best journalistic minds on the continent. We have editors-in-chief, media owners, executive producers, senior editors, chief executive officers, representatives of journalistic organisations, and correspondents, drawn from east, central, north, west and southern Africa. We also have senior level participation from African journalists serving Africa from Europe.

I recognise, among us, some very good friends and colleagues and I welcome you very much.

I have already personally met with some of you, but for others, this is our first meeting. But I believe that before leaving, we will have established long lasting and mutually beneficial working relationships. In any case, we are all here as stakeholders in the development of our beloved continent, and I am very happy that we can take this time to brainstorm and update each other.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues;

This regional media dialogue is taking place within the context of the United Nations Ten Year Capacity Building Programme for the AU. The capacity building programme was signed in November 2006 by the then UN Secretary-General and the then Chairperson of the African Union Commission, as an evolving framework that serves as the overall platform for UN cooperation with the AU.

The Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa) was designated as the implementing organ of the capacity building programme. There are nine clusters within the RCM; and our Advocacy and Communications (ACC) cluster is one of them.

This cluster is co chaired, since the beginning of this year, by the UN Office of the Adviser on Africa through my sister Mieko, and by the AUC Directorate of Information and Communication through myself. As we understand, the UN Economic Commission for Africa is providing secretariat support to the cluster.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues;

We are here to engage in frank discussions between the media and members of the advocacy and communications cluster, with a specific focus on reporting on the NEPAD agency, which, as you may know, is now a fully integrated programme of the African Union Commission.

My main message as co chair of the cluster is that **this is a time for action. It is time to reframe Africa.** Not just to paint a glossy picture, but to report on all the issues- the successes and the challenges.

With your full participation, we have to use these three days to produce a comprehensive and well-articulated programme of collaboration on the coverage of the activities of the NEPAD Agency, complete with timelines and measurable indicators of

achievement. We have to decide on how we will engage each other, practically, to promote the activities of the NEPAD agency in particular, and those of the African Union in general.

As information specialists, we must be honest and ask the questions that need to be asked and agree on a way forward.

For example, since the 1st media dialogue in 2009 and the Dakar brainstorming workshop of 2010, what, if any concrete outcomes have we registered? The objective of the Vaal meeting in 2009 was to increase understanding of, and support for the NEPAD agency through broader and more insightful journalistic coverage. How far have we gone in this? How can we translate the spirit of the Vaal Consensus into action?

Why is there still little coverage on the AU and its activities outside of peace and security, are there challenges the media face in their work, are we as the AU providing enough information for the media, are we lacking in any way in our service to the media? What other tools do we need to adopt? Do we have a legitimate right to expect you, the African media, to play a role in promoting Africa's development? What is the best way to tell Africa's story? How do we relate with each other from here on? When and how do we report on progress? Can we be sure that, after this meeting, there will be an up scaling of the coverage of AU interventions?

These are some of the issues we must grapple with in our dialogue. We should not let the Maseru Declaration, which we will adopt tomorrow, become yet another document on the shelf.

The African Union is not here to tell you how to do your jobs. Rather, we are here to understand what we can do to provide you with the information that you need to do your jobs. Our commitment to this is total. It is our expectation that when we meet again after this dialogue, we will be able to report on some positive outcomes from this meeting. It really is time to start seeing the difference made by these kinds of dialogues.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues;

We have all seen the beautiful facilities that have been put at our disposal in this beautiful kingdom in the sky. In this regard, I wish to extend the AU's appreciation of the efforts by Lesotho, a member state of the African Union, for hosting this event so well.

Honourable Minister, please accept our heartfelt gratitude for everything your government has done.

It is our belief that, in the United Nations system, we have genuine partners seeking to see the success of Africa. In this respect, I want to thank, very sincerely my sister and co chair of the Advocacy and Communications Cluster, Mieke Ikegame from the UN Office of the Special Advisor for Africa for her energy and enthusiasm in ensuring that this dialogue takes place. I wish to thank the team in the cluster that she worked with, for making sure the programmes; the invitations, the concept papers and all other arrangements were made in good time.

I wish to thank the United Nations Development Programme who coordinated a lot of the efforts towards this meeting. I wish also to acknowledge the Economic Commission for Africa who organised the first media dialogue and continue to be partners in interrogating the issues of media in Africa.

Coming closer to home, I want to thank the NEPAD agency for their untiring efforts to improve communication and their openness to new ideas. This is an example of the results based approach to business that the African Union is pursuing.

Finally, I want to thank each and every one of the representatives of the media who are here. You have, through your own drive and commitment, contributed immensely to the coverage of African issues- you are helping to portray Africa as a truly dynamic player in the global arena as stated in the vision of the African Union. The AU commends your work and assures you of its continued support.

I wish to end with a modified quote from the writer, lecturer and humourist Mark Twain who said:

“There are only two forces that can carry light to all the corners of the globe... the sun in the heavens above and the media down here”.

I thank you.